VIII

And now, stoical in the cold and darkness of his regained life, Lingard had to listen to the voice of Wasub telling him Jaffir's story. The old serang's face expressed a profound dejection and there was infinite sadness in the flowing murmur of his words.

"Yes, by Allah! They were all there: that tyrannical Tengga, noisy like a fool; the Rajah Hassim, a ruler without a country; Daman, the wandering chief, and the three Pangerans of the sea-robbers. They came on board boldly, for Tuan Jorgenson had given them permission, and their talk was that you, Tuan, were a willing captive in Belarab's stockade. They said they had waited all night for a message of peace from you or from Belarab. But there was nothing, and with the first sign of day they put out on the lagoon to make friends with Tuan Jorgenson; for, they said, you, Tuan, were as if you had not been, possessing no more power than a dead man, the mere slave of these strange white people, and Belarab's prisoner. Thus Tengga talked. God had taken from him all wisdom and all fear. And then he must have thought he was safe while Rajah Hassim and the lady Immada were on board. I tell you they sat there in the midst of your enemies, captive! The lady Immada, with her face covered, mourned to herself. The Rajah Hassim made a sign to Jaffir and Jaffir came to stand by his side and talked to his lord. The main hatch was open and many of the Illanuns crowded there to look down at the goods that were inside the ship. They had never seen so much loot in their lives. Jaffir and his lord could hear plainly Tuan Jorgenson and Tengga talking together. Tengga discoursed loudly and his words were the words of a doomed man, for he was asking Tuan Jorgenson to give up the arms and everything that was on board the Emma to himself and to Daman. And then, he said, 'We shall fight Belarab and make friends with these strange white people by behaving generously to them and letting them sail away unharmed to their own country. We don't want them here. You, Tuan Jorgenson, are the only white man I care for.' They heard Tuan Jorgenson say to Tengga: 'Now you have told me everything there is in your mind you had better go ashore with your friends and return to-morrow.' And Tengga asked: 'Why! would you fight me to-morrow rather than live many days in peace with me?' and he laughed and slapped his thigh. And Tuan Jorgenson answered:

"'No, I won't fight you. But even a spider will give the fly time to say its prayers.'

"Tuan Jorgenson's voice sounded very strange and louder than ever anybody had heard it before. O Rajah Laut, Jaffir and the white man had been waiting, too, all night for some sign from you; a shot fired or a signal-fire, lighted to strengthen

their hearts. There had been nothing. Rajah Hassim, whispering, ordered Jaffir to take the first opportunity to leap overboard and take to you his message of friendship and good-bye. Did the Rajah and Jaffir know what was coming? Who can tell? But what else could they see than calamity for all Wajo men, whatever Tuan Jorgenson had made up his mind to do? Jaffir prepared to obey his lord, and yet with so many enemies' boats in the water he did not think he would ever reach the shore; and as to yourself he was not at all sure that you were still alive. But he said nothing of this to his Rajah. Nobody was looking their way. Jaffir pressed his lord's hand to his breast and waited his opportunity. The fog began to blow away and presently everything was disclosed to the sight. Jorgenson was on his feet, he was holding a lighted cigar between his fingers. Tengga was sitting in front of him on one of the chairs the white people had used. His followers were pressing round him, with Daman and Sentot, who were muttering incantations; and even the Pangerans had moved closer to the hatchway. Jaffir's opportunity had come but he lingered by the side of his Rajah. In the clear air the sun shone with great force. Tuan Jorgenson looked once more toward Belarab's stockade, O Rajah Laut! But there was nothing there, not even a flag displayed that had not been there before. Jaffir looked that way, too, and as he turned his head he saw Tuan Jorgenson, in the midst of twenty spear-blades that could in an instant have been driven into his breast, put the cigar in his mouth and jump down the hatchway. At that moment Rajah Hassim gave Jaffir a push toward the side and Jaffir leaped overboard.

"He was still in the water when all the world was darkened round him as if the life of the sun had been blown out of it in a crash. A great wave came along and washed him on shore, while pieces of wood, iron, and the limbs of torn men were splashing round him in the water. He managed to crawl out of the mud. Something had hit him while he was swimming and he thought he would die. But life stirred in him. He had a message for you. For a long time he went on crawling under the big trees on his hands and knees, for there is no rest for a messenger till the message is delivered. At last he found himself on the left bank of the creek. And still he felt life stir in him. So he started to swim across, for if you were in this world you were on the other side. While he swam he felt his strength abandoning him. He managed to scramble on to a drifting log and lay on it like one who is dead, till we pulled him into one of our boats."

Wasub ceased. It seemed to Lingard that it was impossible for mortal man to suffer more than he suffered in the succeeding moment of silence crowded by the mute images as of universal destruction. He felt himself gone to pieces as though the violent expression of Jorgenson's intolerable mistrust of the life of men had shattered his soul, leaving his body robbed of all power of resistance and of all fortitude, a prey forever to infinite remorse and endless regrets.

"Leave me, Wasub," he said. "They are all dead--but I would sleep."

Wasub raised his dumb old eyes to the white man's face.

"Tuan, it is necessary that you should hear Jaffir," he said, patiently.

"Is he going to die?" asked Lingard in a low, cautious tone as though he were afraid of the sound of his own voice.

"Who can tell?" Wasub's voice sounded more patient than ever. "There is no wound on his body but, O Tuan, he does not wish to live."

"Abandoned by his God," muttered Lingard to himself.

Wasub waited a little before he went on, "And, Tuan, he has a message for you."

"Of course. Well, I don't want to hear it."

"It is from those who will never speak to you again," Wasub persevered, sadly. "It is a great trust. A Rajah's own words. It is difficult for Jaffir to die. He keeps on muttering about a ring that was for you, and that he let pass out of his care. It was a great talisman!"

"Yes. But it did not work this time. And if I go and tell Jaffir why he will be able to tell his Rajah, O Wasub, since you say that he is going to die. . . . I wonder where they will meet," he muttered to himself.

Once more Wasub raised his eyes to Lingard's face. "Paradise is the lot of all True Believers," he whispered, firm in his simple faith.

The man who had been undone by a glimpse of Paradise exchanged a profound look with the old Malay. Then he got up. On his passage to the main hatchway the commander of the brig met no one on the decks, as if all mankind had given him up except the old man who preceded him and that other man dying in the deepening twilight, who was awaiting his coming. Below, in the light of the hatchway, he saw a young Calash with a broad yellow face and his wiry hair sticking up in stiff wisps through the folds of his head-kerchief, holding an earthenware water-jar to the lips of Jaffir extended on his back on a pile of mats.

A languid roll of the already glazed eyeballs, a mere stir of black and white in the gathering dusk showed that the faithful messenger of princes was aware of the presence of the man who had been so long known to him and his people as the King of the Sea. Lingard knelt down close to Jaffir's head, which rolled a little

from side to side and then became still, staring at a beam of the upper deck. Lingard bent his ear to the dark lips. "Deliver your message" he said in a gentle tone.

"The Rajah wished to hold your hand once more," whispered Jaffir so faintly that Lingard had to guess the words rather than hear them. "I was to tell you," he went on--and stopped suddenly.

"What were you to tell me?"

"To forget everything," said Jaffir with a loud effort as if beginning a long speech. After that he said nothing more till Lingard murmured, "And the lady Immada?"

Jaffir collected all his strength. "She hoped no more," he uttered, distinctly. "The order came to her while she mourned, veiled, apart. I didn't even see her face."

Lingard swayed over the dying man so heavily that Wasub, standing near by, hastened to catch him by the shoulder. Jaffir seemed unaware of anything, and went on staring at the beam.

"Can you hear me, O Jaffir?" asked Lingard.

"I hear."

"I never had the ring. Who could bring it to me?"

"We gave it to the white woman--may Jehannum be her lot!"

"No! It shall be my lot," said Lingard with despairing force, while Wasub raised both his hands in dismay. "For, listen, Jaffir, if she had given the ring to me it would have been to one that was dumb, deaf, and robbed of all courage."

It was impossible to say whether Jaffir had heard. He made no sound, there was no change in his awful stare, but his prone body moved under the cotton sheet as if to get further away from the white man. Lingard got up slowly and making a sign to Wasub to remain where he was, went up on deck without giving another glance to the dying man. Again it seemed to him that he was pacing the quarter-deck of a deserted ship. The mulatto steward, watching through the crack of the pantry door, saw the Captain stagger into the cuddy and fling-to the door behind him with a crash. For more than an hour nobody approached that closed door till Carter coming down the companion stairs spoke without attempting to open it.

"Are you there, sir?" The answer, "You may come in," comforted the young man

by its strong resonance. He went in.

"Well?"

"Jaffir is dead. This moment. I thought you would want to know."

Lingard looked persistently at Carter, thinking that now Jaffir was dead there was no one left on the empty earth to speak to him a word of reproach; no one to know the greatness of his intentions, the bond of fidelity between him and Hassim and Immada, the depth of his affection for those people, the earnestness of his visions, and the unbounded trust that was his reward. By the mad scorn of Jorgenson flaming up against the life of men, all this was as if it had never been. It had become a secret locked up in his own breast forever.

"Tell Wasub to open one of the long-cloth bales in the hold, Mr. Carter, and give the crew a cotton sheet to bury him decently according to their faith. Let it be done to-night. They must have the boats, too. I suppose they will want to take him on the sandbank."

"Yes, sir," said Carter.

"Let them have what they want, spades, torches. . . . Wasub will chant the right words. Paradise is the lot of all True Believers. Do you understand me, Mr. Carter? Paradise! I wonder what it will be for him! Unless he gets messages to carry through the jungle, avoiding ambushes, swimming in storms and knowing no rest, he won't like it."

Carter listened with an unmoved face. It seemed to him that the Captain had forgotten his presence.

"And all the time he will be sleeping on that sandbank," Lingard began again, sitting in his old place under the gilt thunderbolts suspended over his head with his elbows on the table and his hands to his temples. "If they want a board to set up at the grave let them have a piece of an oak plank. It will stay there--till the next monsoon. Perhaps."

Carter felt uncomfortable before that tense stare which just missed him and in that confined cabin seemed awful in its piercing and far-off expression. But as he had not been dismissed he did not like to go away.

"Everything will be done as you wish it, sir," he said. "I suppose the yacht will be leaving the first thing to-morrow morning, sir."

"If she doesn't we must give her a solid shot or two to liven her up--eh, Mr. Carter?"

Carter did not know whether to smile or to look horrified. In the end he did both, but as to saying anything he found it impossible. But Lingard did not expect an answer.

"I believe you are going to stay with me, Mr. Carter?"

"I told you, sir, I am your man if you want me."

"The trouble is, Mr. Carter, that I am no longer the man to whom you spoke that night in Carimata."

"Neither am I, sir, in a manner of speaking."

Lingard, relaxing the tenseness of his stare, looked at the young man, thoughtfully.

"After all, it is the brig that will want you. She will never change. The finest craft afloat in these seas. She will carry me about as she did before, but . . ."

He unclasped his hands, made a sweeping gesture.

Carter gave all his naive sympathy to that man who had certainly rescued the white people but seemed to have lost his own soul in the attempt. Carter had heard something from Wasub. He had made out enough of this story from the old serang's pidgin English to know that the Captain's native friends, one of them a woman, had perished in a mysterious catastrophe. But the why of it, and how it came about, remained still quite incomprehensible to him. Of course, a man like the Captain would feel terribly cut up. . . .

"You will be soon yourself again, sir," he said in the kindest possible tone.

With the same simplicity Lingard shook his head. He was thinking of the dead Jaffir with his last message delivered and untroubled now by all these matters of the earth. He had been ordered to tell him to forget everything. Lingard had an inward shudder. In the dismay of his heart he might have believed his brig to lie under the very wing of the Angel of Desolation--so oppressive, so final, and hopeless seemed the silence in which he and Carter looked at each other, wistfully.

Lingard reached for a sheet of paper amongst several lying on the table, took up a

pen, hesitated a moment, and then wrote:

"Meet me at day-break on the sandbank."

He addressed the envelope to Mrs. Travers, Yacht Hermit, and pushed it across the table.

"Send this on board the schooner at once, Mr. Carter. Wait a moment. When our boats shove off for the sandbank have the forecastle gun fired. I want to know when that dead man has left the ship."

He sat alone, leaning his head on his hand, listening, listening endlessly, for the report of the gun. Would it never come? When it came at last muffled, distant, with a slight shock through the body of the brig he remained still with his head leaning on his hand but with a distinct conviction, with an almost physical certitude, that under the cotton sheet shrouding the dead man something of himself, too, had left the ship.

IX

In a roomy cabin, furnished and fitted with austere comfort, Mr. Travers reposed at ease in a low bed-place under a snowy white sheet and a light silk coverlet, his head sunk in a white pillow of extreme purity. A faint scent of lavender hung about the fresh linen. Though lying on his back like a person who is seriously ill Mr. Travers was conscious of nothing worse than a great fatigue. Mr. Travers' restfulness had something faintly triumphant in it. To find himself again on board his yacht had soothed his vanity and had revived his sense of his own importance. He contemplated it in a distant perspective, restored to its proper surroundings and unaffected by an adventure too extraordinary to trouble a superior mind or even to remain in one's memory for any length of time. He was not responsible. Like many men ambitious of directing the affairs of a nation, Mr. Travers disliked the sense of responsibility. He would not have been above evading it in case of need, but with perverse loftiness he really, in his heart, scorned it. That was the reason why he was able to lie at rest and enjoy a sense of returning vigour. But he did not care much to talk as yet, and that was why the silence in the stateroom had lasted for hours. The bulkhead lamp had a green silk shade. It was unnecessary to admit for a moment the existence of impudence or ruffianism. A discreet knocking at the cabin door sounded deferential.

Mrs. Travers got up to see what was wanted, and returned without uttering a single word to the folding armchair by the side of the bed-place, with an envelope in her hand which she tore open in the greenish light. Mr. Travers remained incurious but his wife handed to him an unfolded sheet of paper which he condescended to hold up to his eyes. It contained only one line of writing. He let the paper fall on the coverlet and went on reposing as before. It was a sick man's repose. Mrs. Travers in the armchair, with her hands on the arm-rests, had a great dignity of attitude.

"I intend to go," she declared after a time.

"You intend to go," repeated Mr. Travers in a feeble, deliberate voice. "Really, it doesn't matter what you decide to do. All this is of so little importance. It seems to me that there can be no possible object."

"Perhaps not," she admitted. "But don't you think that the uttermost farthing should always be paid?"

Mr. Travers' head rolled over on the pillow and gave a covertly scared look at that outspoken woman. But it rolled back again at once and the whole man remained passive, the very embodiment of helpless exhaustion. Mrs. Travers noticed this, and had the unexpected impression that Mr. Travers was not so ill as he looked.

"He's making the most of it. It's a matter of diplomacy," she thought. She thought this without irony, bitterness, or disgust. Only her heart sank a little lower and she felt that she could not remain in the cabin with that man for the rest of the evening. For all life--yes! But not for that evening.

"It's simply monstrous," murmured the man, who was either very diplomatic or very exhausted, in a languid manner. "There is something abnormal in you."

Mrs. Travers got up swiftly.

"One comes across monstrous things. But I assure you that of all the monsters that wait on what you would call a normal existence the one I dread most is tediousness. A merciless monster without teeth or claws. Impotent. Horrible!"

She left the stateroom, vanishing out of it with noiseless resolution. No power on earth could have kept her in there for another minute. On deck she found a moonless night with a velvety tepid feeling in the air, and in the sky a mass of blurred starlight, like the tarnished tinsel of a worn-out, very old, very tedious firmament. The usual routine of the yacht had been already resumed, the awnings had been stretched aft, a solitary round lamp had been hung as usual under the main boom. Out of the deep gloom behind it d'Alcacer, a long, loose figure, lounged in the dim light across the deck. D'Alcacer had got promptly in touch with the store of cigarettes he owed to the Governor General's generosity. A large, pulsating spark glowed, illuminating redly the design of his lips under the fine dark moustache, the tip of his nose, his lean chin. D'Alcacer reproached himself for an unwonted light-heartedness which had somehow taken possession of him. He had not experienced that sort of feeling for years. Reprehensible as it was he did not want anything to disturb it. But as he could not run away openly from Mrs. Travers he advanced to meet her.

"I do hope you have nothing to tell me," he said with whimsical earnestness.

"I? No! Have you?"

He assured her he had not, and proffered a request. "Don't let us tell each other anything, Mrs. Travers. Don't let us think of anything. I believe it will be the best way to get over the evening." There was real anxiety in his jesting tone.

"Very well," Mrs. Travers assented, seriously. "But in that case we had better not remain together." She asked, then, d'Alcacer to go below and sit with Mr. Travers who didn't like to be left alone. "Though he, too, doesn't seem to want to be told anything," she added, parenthetically, and went on: "But I must ask you something else, Mr. d'Alcacer. I propose to sit down in this chair and go to sleep--

if I can. Will you promise to call me about five o'clock? I prefer not to speak to any one on deck, and, moreover, I can trust you."

He bowed in silence and went away slowly. Mrs. Travers, turning her head, perceived a steady light at the brig's yard-arm, very bright among the tarnished stars. She walked aft and looked over the taffrail. It was exactly like that other night. She half expected to hear presently the low, rippling sound of an advancing boat. But the universe remained without a sound. When she at last dropped into the deck chair she was absolutely at the end of her power of thinking. "I suppose that's how the condemned manage to get some sleep on the night before the execution," she said to herself a moment before her eyelids closed as if under a leaden hand.

She woke up, with her face wet with tears, out of a vivid dream of Lingard in chain-mail armour and vaguely recalling a Crusader, but bare-headed and walking away from her in the depths of an impossible landscape. She hurried on to catch up with him but a throng of barbarians with enormous turbans came between them at the last moment and she lost sight of him forever in the flurry of a ghastly sand-storm. What frightened her most was that she had not been able to see his face. It was then that she began to cry over her hard fate. When she woke up the tears were still rolling down her cheeks and she perceived in the light of the deck-lamp d'Alcacer arrested a little way off.

"Did you have to speak to me?" she asked.

"No," said d'Alcacer. "You didn't give me time. When I came as far as this I fancied I heard you sobbing. It must have been a delusion."

"Oh, no. My face is wet yet. It was a dream. I suppose it is five o'clock. Thank you for being so punctual. I have something to do before sunrise."

D'Alcacer moved nearer. "I know. You have decided to keep an appointment on the sandbank. Your husband didn't utter twenty words in all these hours but he managed to tell me that piece of news."

"I shouldn't have thought," she murmured, vaguely.

"He wanted me to understand that it had no importance," stated d'Alcacer in a very serious tone.

"Yes. He knows what he is talking about," said Mrs. Travers in such a bitter tone as to disconcert d'Alcacer for a moment. "I don't see a single soul about the decks," Mrs. Travers continued, almost directly.

"The very watchmen are asleep," said d'Alcacer.

"There is nothing secret in this expedition, but I prefer not to call any one. Perhaps you wouldn't mind pulling me off yourself in our small boat."

It seemed to her that d'Alcacer showed some hesitation. She added: "It has no importance, you know."

He bowed his assent and preceded her down the side in silence. When she entered the boat he had the sculls ready and directly she sat down he shoved off. It was so dark yet that but for the brig's yard-arm light he could not have kept his direction. He pulled a very deliberate stroke, looking over his shoulder frequently. It was Mrs. Travers who saw first the faint gleam of the uncovered sandspit on the black, quiet water.

"A little more to the left," she said. "No, the other way. . . ." D'Alcacer obeyed her directions but his stroke grew even slower than before. She spoke again. "Don't you think that the uttermost farthing should always be paid, Mr. d'Alcacer?"

D'Alcacer glanced over his shoulder, then: "It would be the only honourable way. But it may be hard. Too hard for our common fearful hearts."

"I am prepared for anything."

He ceased pulling for a moment . . . "Anything that may be found on a sandbank," Mrs. Travers went on. "On an arid, insignificant, and deserted sandbank."

D'Alcacer gave two strokes and ceased again.

"There is room for a whole world of suffering on a sandbank, for all the bitterness and resentment a human soul may be made to feel."

"Yes, I suppose you would know," she whispered while he gave a stroke or two and again glanced over his shoulder. She murmured the words:

"Bitterness, resentment," and a moment afterward became aware of the keel of the boat running up on the sand. But she didn't move, and d'Alcacer, too, remained seated on the thwart with the blades of his sculls raised as if ready to drop them and back the dinghy out into deep water at the first sign.

Mrs. Travers made no sign, but she asked, abruptly: "Mr. d'Alcacer, do you think

I shall ever come back?"

Her tone seemed to him to lack sincerity. But who could tell what this abruptness covered--sincere fear or mere vanity? He asked himself whether she was playing a part for his benefit, or only for herself.

"I don't think you quite understand the situation, Mrs. Travers. I don't think you have a clear idea, either of his simplicity or of his visionary's pride."

She thought, contemptuously, that there were other things which d'Alcacer didn't know and surrendered to a sudden temptation to enlighten him a little.

"You forget his capacity for passion and that his simplicity doesn't know its own strength."

There was no mistaking the sincerity of that murmur. "She has felt it," d'Alcacer said to himself with absolute certitude. He wondered when, where, how, on what occasion? Mrs. Travers stood up in the stern sheets suddenly and d'Alcacer leaped on the sand to help her out of the boat.

"Hadn't I better hang about here to take you back again?" he suggested, as he let go her hand.

"You mustn't!" she exclaimed, anxiously. "You must return to the yacht. There will be plenty of light in another hour. I will come to this spot and wave my handkerchief when I want to be taken off."

At their feet the shallow water slept profoundly, the ghostly gleam of the sands baffled the eye by its lack of form. Far off, the growth of bushes in the centre raised a massive black bulk against the stars to the southward. Mrs. Travers lingered for a moment near the boat as if afraid of the strange solitude of this lonely sandbank and of this lone sea that seemed to fill the whole encircling universe of remote stars and limitless shadows. "There is nobody here," she whispered to herself.

"He is somewhere about waiting for you, or I don't know the man," affirmed d'Alcacer in an undertone. He gave a vigorous shove which sent the little boat into the water.

D'Alcacer was perfectly right. Lingard had come up on deck long before Mrs. Travers woke up with her face wet with tears. The burial party had returned hours before and the crew of the brig were plunged in sleep, except for two watchmen, who at Lingard's appearance retreated noiselessly from the poop.

Lingard, leaning on the rail, fell into a sombre reverie of his past. Reproachful spectres crowded the air, animated and vocal, not in the articulate language of mortals but assailing him with faint sobs, deep sighs, and fateful gestures. When he came to himself and turned about they vanished, all but one dark shape without sound or movement. Lingard looked at it with secret horror.

"Who's that?" he asked in a troubled voice.

The shadow moved closer: "It's only me, sir," said Carter, who had left orders to be called directly the Captain was seen on deck.

"Oh, yes, I might have known," mumbled Lingard in some confusion. He requested Carter to have a boat manned and when after a time the young man told him that it was ready, he said "All right!" and remained leaning on his elbow.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Carter after a longish silence, "but are you going some distance?"

"No, I only want to be put ashore on the sandbank."

Carter was relieved to hear this, but also surprised. "There is nothing living there, sir," he said.

"I wonder," muttered Lingard.

"But I am certain," Carter insisted. "The last of the women and children belonging to those cut-throats were taken off by the sampans which brought you and the yacht-party out."

He walked at Lingard's elbow to the gangway and listened to his orders.

"Directly there is enough light to see flags by, make a signal to the schooner to heave short on her cable and loose her sails. If there is any hanging back give them a blank gun, Mr. Carter. I will have no shilly-shallying. If she doesn't go at the word, by heavens, I will drive her out. I am still master here--for another day."

The overwhelming sense of immensity, of disturbing emptiness, which affects those who walk on the sands in the midst of the sea, intimidated Mrs. Travers. The world resembled a limitless flat shadow which was motionless and elusive. Then against the southern stars she saw a human form that isolated and lone appeared to her immense: the shape of a giant outlined amongst the constellations. As it approached her it shrank to common proportions, got clear of the stars, lost its awesomeness, and became menacing in its ominous and silent

advance. Mrs. Travers hastened to speak.

"You have asked for me. I am come. I trust you will have no reason to regret my obedience."

He walked up quite close to her, bent down slightly to peer into her face. The first of the tropical dawn put its characteristic cold sheen into the sky above the Shore of Refuge.

Mrs. Travers did not turn away her head.

"Are you looking for a change in me? No. You won't see it. Now I know that I couldn't change even if I wanted to. I am made of clay that is too hard."

"I am looking at you for the first time," said Lingard. "I never could see you before. There were too many things, too many thoughts, too many people. No, I never saw you before. But now the world is dead."

He grasped her shoulders, approaching his face close to hers. She never flinched.

"Yes, the world is dead," she said. "Look your fill then. It won't be for long."

He let her go as suddenly as though she had struck him. The cold white light of the tropical dawn had crept past the zenith now and the expanse of the shallow waters looked cold, too, without stir or ripple within the enormous rim of the horizon where, to the west, a shadow lingered still.

"Take my arm," he said.

She did so at once, and turning their backs on the two ships they began to walk along the sands, but they had not made many steps when Mrs. Travers perceived an oblong mound with a board planted upright at one end. Mrs. Travers knew that part of the sands. It was here she used to walk with her husband and d'Alcacer every evening after dinner, while the yacht lay stranded and her boats were away in search of assistance--which they had found--which they had found! This was something that she had never seen there before. Lingard had suddenly stopped and looked at it moodily. She pressed his arm to rouse him and asked, "What is this?"

"This is a grave," said Lingard in a low voice, and still gazing at the heap of sand. "I had him taken out of the ship last night. Strange," he went on in a musing tone, "how much a grave big enough for one man only can hold. His message was to forget everything."

"Never, never," murmured Mrs. Travers. "I wish I had been on board the Emma. . . . You had a madman there," she cried out, suddenly. They moved on again, Lingard looking at Mrs. Travers who was leaning on his arm.

"I wonder which of us two was mad," he said.

"I wonder you can bear to look at me," she murmured. Then Lingard spoke again.

"I had to see you once more."

"That abominable Jorgenson," she whispered to herself.

"No, no, he gave me my chance--before he gave me up."

Mrs. Travers disengaged her arm and Lingard stopped, too, facing her in a long silence.

"I could not refuse to meet you," said Mrs. Travers at last. "I could not refuse you anything. You have all the right on your side and I don't care what you do or say. But I wonder at my own courage when I think of the confession I have to make." She advanced, laid her hand on Lingard's shoulder and spoke earnestly. "I shuddered at the thought of meeting you again. And now you must listen to my confession."

"Don't say a word," said Lingard in an untroubled voice and never taking his eyes from her face. "I know already."

"You can't," she cried. Her hand slipped off his shoulder. "Then why don't you throw me into the sea?" she asked, passionately. "Am I to live on hating myself?"

"You mustn't!" he said with an accent of fear. "Haven't you understood long ago that if you had given me that ring it would have been just the same?"

"Am I to believe this? No, no! You are too generous to a mere sham. You are the most magnanimous of men but you are throwing it away on me. Do you think it is remorse that I feel? No. If it is anything it is despair. But you must have known that--and yet you wanted to look at me again."

"I told you I never had a chance before," said Lingard in an unmoved voice. "It was only after I heard they gave you the ring that I felt the hold you have got on me. How could I tell before? What has hate or love to do with you and me? Hate. Love. What can touch you? For me you stand above death itself; for I see now

that as long as I live you will never die."

They confronted each other at the southern edge of the sands as if afloat on the open sea. The central ridge heaped up by the winds masked from them the very mastheads of the two ships and the growing brightness of the light only augmented the sense of their invincible solitude in the awful serenity of the world. Mrs. Travers suddenly put her arm across her eyes and averted her face.

Then he added:

"That's all."

Mrs. Travers let fall her arm and began to retrace her steps, unsupported and alone. Lingard followed her on the edge of the sand uncovered by the ebbing tide. A belt of orange light appeared in the cold sky above the black forest of the Shore of Refuge and faded quickly to gold that melted soon into a blinding and colourless glare. It was not till after she had passed Jaffir's grave that Mrs. Travers stole a backward glance and discovered that she was alone. Lingard had left her to herself. She saw him sitting near the mound of sand, his back bowed, his hands clasping his knees, as if he had obeyed the invincible call of his great visions haunting the grave of the faithful messenger. Shading her eyes with her hand Mrs. Travers watched the immobility of that man of infinite illusions. He never moved, he never raised his head. It was all over. He was done with her. She waited a little longer and then went slowly on her way.

Shaw, now acting second mate of the yacht, came off with another hand in a little boat to take Mrs. Travers on board. He stared at her like an offended owl. How the lady could suddenly appear at sunrise waving her handkerchief from the sandbank he could not understand. For, even if she had managed to row herself off secretly in the dark, she could not have sent the empty boat back to the yacht. It was to Shaw a sort of improper miracle.

D'Alcacer hurried to the top of the side ladder and as they met on deck Mrs. Travers astonished him by saying in a strangely provoking tone:

"You were right. I have come back." Then with a little laugh which impressed d'Alcacer painfully she added with a nod downward, "and Martin, too, was perfectly right. It was absolutely unimportant."

She walked on straight to the taffrail and d'Alcacer followed her aft, alarmed at her white face, at her brusque movements, at the nervous way in which she was fumbling at her throat. He waited discreetly till she turned round and thrust out toward him her open palm on which he saw a thick gold ring set with a large

green stone.

"Look at this, Mr. d'Alcacer. This is the thing which I asked you whether I should give up or conceal--the symbol of the last hour--the call of the supreme minute. And he said it would have made no difference! He is the most magnanimous of men and the uttermost farthing has been paid. He has done with me. The most magnanimous . . . but there is a grave on the sands by which I left him sitting with no glance to spare for me. His last glance on earth! I am left with this thing. Absolutely unimportant. A dead talisman." With a nervous jerk she flung the ring overboard, then with a hurried entreaty to d'Alcacer, "Stay here a moment. Don't let anybody come near us," she burst into tears and turned her back on him.

Lingard returned on board his brig and in the early afternoon the Lightning got under way, running past the schooner to give her a lead through the maze of Shoals. Lingard was on deck but never looked once at the following vessel. Directly both ships were in clear water he went below saying to Carter: "You know what to do."

"Yes, sir," said Carter.

Shortly after his Captain had disappeared from the deck Carter laid the main topsail to the mast. The Lightning lost her way while the schooner with all her light kites abroad passed close under her stern holding on her course. Mrs. Travers stood aft very rigid, gripping the rail with both hands. The brim of her white hat was blown upward on one side and her yachting skirt stirred in the breeze. By her side d'Alcacer waved his hand courteously. Carter raised his cap to them.

During the afternoon he paced the poop with measured steps, with a pair of binoculars in his hand. At last he laid the glasses down, glanced at the compass-card and walked to the cabin skylight which was open.

"Just lost her, sir," he said. All was still down there. He raised his voice a little:

"You told me to let you know directly I lost sight of the yacht."

The sound of a stifled groan reached the attentive Carter and a weary voice said, "All right, I am coming."

When Lingard stepped out on the poop of the Lightning the open water had turned purple already in the evening light, while to the east the Shallows made a steely glitter all along the sombre line of the shore. Lingard, with folded arms, looked over the sea. Carter approached him and spoke quietly.

"The tide has turned and the night is coming on. Hadn't we better get away from these Shoals, sir?"

Lingard did not stir.

"Yes, the night is coming on. You may fill the main topsail, Mr. Carter," he said and he relapsed into silence with his eyes fixed in the southern board where the shadows were creeping stealthily toward the setting sun. Presently Carter stood at his elbow again.

"The brig is beginning to forge ahead, sir," he said in a warning tone.

Lingard came out of his absorption with a deep tremor of his powerful frame like the shudder of an uprooted tree.

"How was the yacht heading when you lost sight of her?" he asked.

"South as near as possible," answered Carter. "Will you give me a course to steer for the night, sir?"

Lingard's lips trembled before he spoke but his voice was calm.

"Steer north," he said.

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